SDG 16: PROTECT AND INCLUDE CHILDREN FOR PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

At the 2019 High Level Political Forum (HLPF), the overarching theme will be Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality. Additionally, Sustainable Development Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, is one of the six goals being examined in depth.

Peace, stability, human rights and effective governance, based on the rule of law are central to the realization of child rights; and a prerequisite for sustainable development. SDG 16 includes several explicit targets for children (16.2 on violence against children; and 16.9 on legal identity for all, including birth registration); as well as many others where child rights are implicit, such as 16.3 on the rule of law and equal access to justice, 16.6 on strong institutions; and 16.7 on inclusive societies.

PEACEFUL SOCIETIES

High levels of violence, conflict, insecurity, crime and exploitation have a profound impact on sustainable development. Millions of children around the globe experience emotional, physical and sexual violence in homes, communities, schools, workplaces, detention centres, and institutions and online. In 2016, around 12 million children had migrated across borders or been forcibly displaced due to conflict, violence and natural disasters. An estimated 23 million children were living in internal displacement – 16 million as a result of conflict. As children are particularly vulnerable to long-term effects of violence, exploitation and abuse, they require special protection and attention.

UNICEF urges all governments to:

• Establish high-level oversight of a coordinated national agenda to end all forms of violence against children and invest in child protection.
• Reform laws to prohibit all forms of violence against children in all settings.
• Strengthen child protection systems and the social services workforce across all sectors – social welfare, justice, health, education and security.
• Strengthen capacity amongst children, parents/caregivers, communities and leaders/decision makers to challenge harmful attitudes and behaviors, and adopt positive social norms and practices.

JUST SOCIETIES

Strengthening the rule of law and promoting human rights is key to establishing peaceful and inclusive societies. While the right to access justice applies equally to children and adults, it is often overlooked in relation to children in contact with the law - whether as alleged offenders, victims or witnesses. For children to exercise their rights in a meaningful way, effective representation and remedies must be available to enforce their rights and seek reparation.

To be able to claim their rights, a person’s very existence needs to be recognized by the state. The right to be recognized as a person before the law through a legal identity is a prerequisite for being able to exercise all other rights. A birth certificate - as proof of legal identity - is critical to ensuring that children can enjoy their rights from birth. An effective civil registration system, including universal birth registration, is essential to ensuring that all citizens and especially children are recognized before the law, have a nationality; and can access basic social services and be protected from violence, abuse and exploitation including child labour, sexual violence and exploitation, recruitment into armed groups, trafficking, child marriage and prosecution as an adult in criminal proceedings. Birth registration, as an essential component of a country’s civil registry, also strengthens the quality of statistics, aiding planning and government efficiency and investment. UNICEF urges all governments to:

• Strengthen civil registration systems that register every child immediately after birth.
• Identify and address disparities in birth registration between different groups.
• Ensure universal access for children to independent justice systems.
• Reduce the use of deprivation of liberty for children through diversion and the use of alternatives to detention.
• Establish specialized, child-friendly procedures at all points where children are in contact with the law.
INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

Inclusive societies ought to engage people as equal participants in decision-making, policy-making and law-making processes, implementation and scrutiny. Like adults, children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them. This requires that those views be heard and given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Their effective participation can enrich decision-making processes. Children should not be excluded from processes and decisions that affect them and society more broadly based on their age, gender, disability, or other status. UNICEF urges all governments to:

- Promote the meaningful participation of children in society and provide an environment that enables the child to exercise their right to be heard.
- Guarantee the rights of all children in their territory, without discrimination.
- Take urgent action to combat xenophobia and discrimination against disadvantaged groups of children.

MONITORING THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

Addressing all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation of children requires increased investment in data collection and analysis to improve the evidence base for policy making, planning and programming and in working towards filling information gaps. Disaggregated data (e.g. by age, sex, education, wealth quintile, migration or displacement status, ethnicity, disability status) are critical to identify and track the most excluded and vulnerable groups of children.

Of the 20 indicators agreed for measurement of progress towards SDG 16, eight target children, or explicitly require age disaggregation. UNICEF urges all governments to collect and analyze disaggregated data, especially on groups of children particularly vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation.

Additionally, UNICEF encourages countries to build or improve national data collection and monitoring systems on violence against children to generate reliable evidence to guide policy and budgeting and for designing, monitoring and evaluating prevention and response programmes and services.

INVESTING IN CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

Opening up budgets and promoting participatory budget process is a key component in achieving effective, accountable and transparent institutions. When citizens have a say in policy formulation and resource allocation, it contributes to the allocative efficiency of national public financial management and enables better tracking of expenditure that is responsive to children's concerns and good value for money. This is especially important for child protection related services, most of which are provided locally, making it harder to track use of public funds without feedback from concerned families and communities. UNICEF urges all governments to ensure an open and transparent budgeting process, prioritize resource allocation for programmes that further the realization of children’s rights; and establish measures to track and monitor public expenditures for children.

Countries are encouraged to follow the guidance from the General Comment No. 19 on the best possible use of public budgets for realizing child rights. UNICEF stands ready to provide assistance through its Public Finance for Children work.

INCLUDING CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

UNICEF urges all governments to promote the meaningful participation of children in society and to provide an environment that enables the child to exercise their rights (including to be heard) without discrimination. The process in developing Voluntary National Reviews provides an opportunity to consult and act on the voices of children on issues relating to SDG 16.

1A Call to Action, Protecting Children on the Move starts with better Data, UNICEF, IOM, UNHCR, Eurostat, OECD, February 2018.